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ABSTRACT

The aim of the Basic Skills at Work Program was to help improve the competence of the work force in England and Wales in basic literacy, numeracy, and communication skills. Of the 82 Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in England and Wales, 73 participated. Surveys of basic skills requirements as perceived by local employers indicated that very few jobs could be done without competence in basic skills and particularly in reading and oral communication. Employers showed a considerable demand for higher-level basic skills in jobs that were far from the top of the labor market. Results of the second stage of the program that looked at the supply side indicated that much basic skills instruction did not directly address the needs of the workplace or the needs of particular jobs. Forty pilot projects were sponsored to address some of these needs, with partnerships between 37 TECs and local basic skills providers, in most cases colleges of further education. Some 300 companies participated in these projects where basic skills training was delivered to around 7,400 employees. A study of the effectiveness of the projects showed that in nearly three quarters of the projects work continued after program funding stopped. Where the TEC had a high level of involvement in the project, the likelihood of the work continuing in some form was much higher. (YLB)

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Basic Skills at Work

A STRATEGY TO HELP IMPROVE THE COMPETENCE OF THE WORKFORCE IN ENGLAND AND WALES

CE072572

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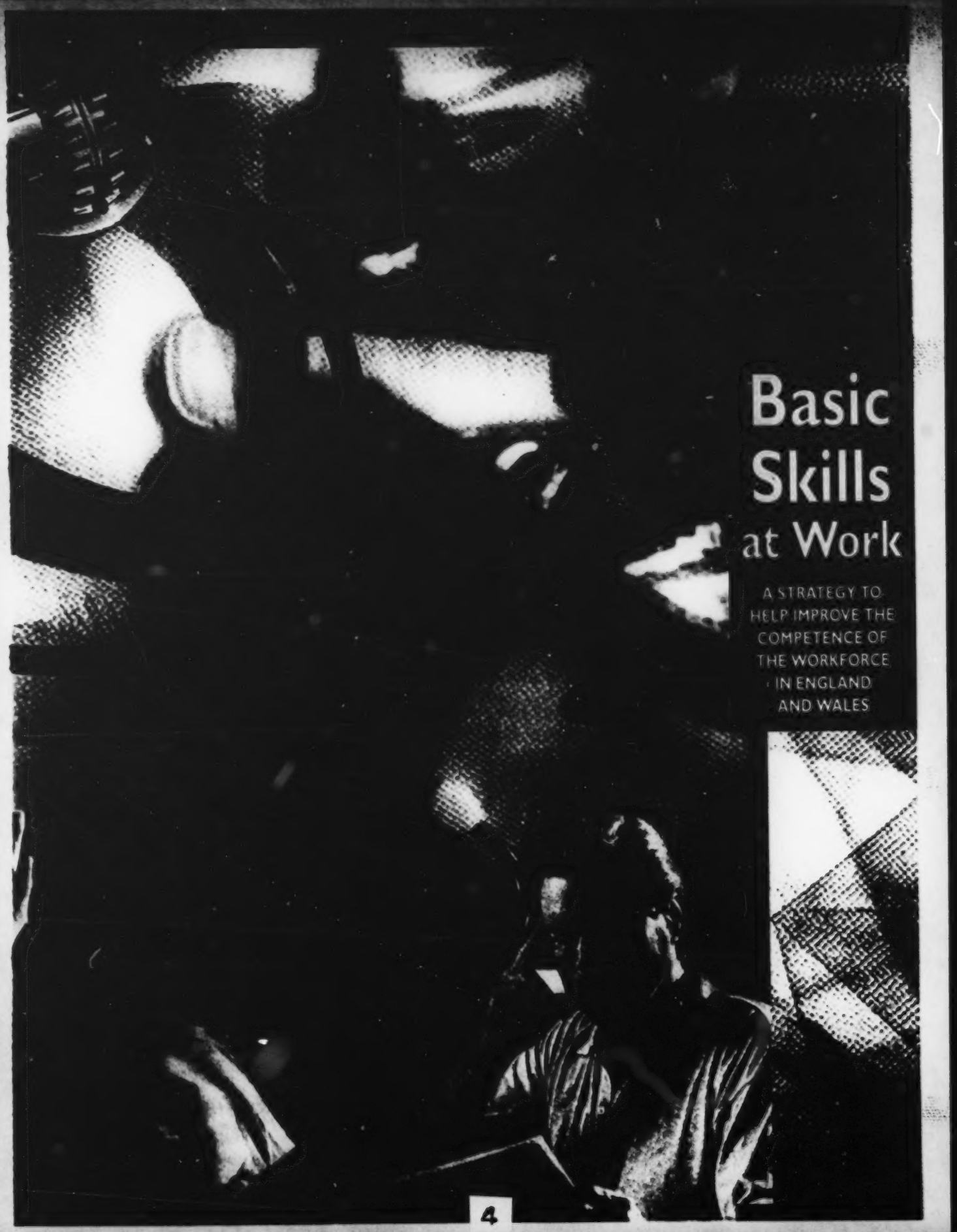

Basic Skills at Work

A STRATEGY TO HELP IMPROVE THE COMPETENCE OF THE WORKFORCE IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Executive Summary

1 THE Basic Skills at Work Programme, managed by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, now the Basic Skills Agency, was funded between April 1991 and March 1995 by the Department for Education, the Employment Department and the Welsh Office. The impetus for the programme came from the Departments and funding of £3 million was made available. The overarching aim of the Basic Skills at Work Programme was to:

'help improve the competence of the workforce in England and Wales in basic literacy, numeracy and communication skills.'

The more specific aims of the Programme were to:

a. *encourage partnerships between Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and Local Education Authorities concerning basic skills training*

b. *provide an opportunity to add value to the existing contributions of TECs and education and training providers in this area*

c. *to develop new approaches to basic skills training for unemployed adults and employees unable to make progress at work because of difficulties with basic skills.*

The Basic Skills at Work Programme had three main elements:

i. *local surveys of the basic skills required by employers*

ii. *surveys of existing vocationally related basic skills provision*

iii. *pilot projects intended to explore new methods of providing basic skills for both unemployed adults and those in work.*

2 LARGE scale labour market research was undertaken gaining information from 24,000 companies and about 1.3 million jobs in the bottom two thirds of the labour market. The research captured about 10 per cent of all jobs below professional, managerial and technical levels. The research showed that almost 9 in 10 jobs require good communication skills, including reading and writing skills. English is the main language in 99% of all workplaces in England and Wales. The majority of jobs require some competence in basic maths. Jobs that do not require basic skills are disappearing rapidly and people with the poorest mastery of basic skills have little choice of job in modern Britain. Anyone with basic skills problems is likely to experience long and frequent periods of unemployment. 73 of the Training and Enterprise Councils in England and Wales participated in this research.

3 THESE TECs also participated in the second stage of the programme which showed that much basic skills provision did not directly address the needs of the workplace or the needs of particular jobs. 40 pilot projects were

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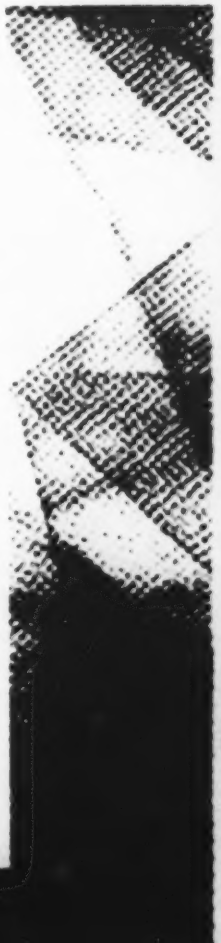
sponsored to address some of these needs, with partnerships between 37 TECs and local basic skills providers, in most cases Colleges of Further Education. Some 300 companies participated in these projects where basic skills training was delivered to around 7,400 employees.

4 A RANGE of strands formed a strategy to address the issue of embedding and disseminating lessons from the Programme including the development of a training certificate for trainers in industry; a resource for trainers developing basic skills training in companies; a database which provides a unique access point to up-to-date information on employers' training practices for basic skills; a technical support programme providing companies with assistance to develop and embed basic skills training.

5 RESEARCH commissioned from WMEB Consultants and the University of Birmingham assessed the contribution of basic skills training to the individual employees and to the company where the training took place. It concluded that basic skills training was particularly effective when it formed part of a company strategy model rather than being a response to a crisis or focused on the individual employee. The corporate strategy model, which complements developments such as Investors in People and TQM initiatives provides the most significant gains in relation to resources expended. Quantifiable increases in production output, greater cohesion and flexibility within the workforce and reduced pressure on production managers arose out of basic skills training.

6 ONE of the most serious barriers to the development of basic skills training is the lack of employer awareness of its need and/or effectiveness and a major conclusion of the Programme is that a continuing programme of raising awareness needs to take place. Companies need to be encouraged to assess their employees for basic skills training needs. Some support is needed to help companies identify their basic skills requirements and to assess the needs of their employees. A clear link to the Investors in People Standard, with some funding attached to the consultancy arrangements designed to support the Standard would provide valuable TEC support and involvement. The Basic Skills at Work Programme showed that integrating basic skills training into other training strategies is a far better option than trying to 'bolt on' basic skills training as a separate activity. However companies need specialist advice on how to do this. Most employees have some skills and often need 'up-skilling' rather than remediation.



7 LACK of proficiency in literacy and numeracy has become a crucial concern for business. It links education, training and industrial competitiveness and needs to be addressed by the three government departments concerned, as part of an ongoing brief rather than through a time-bound programme.

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mplementation of the Programme

A PROSPECTUS was sent to all TECs in May 1991 describing the aims of the programme and its various elements and inviting TECs to get in touch if they wished to participate. The prospectus was also sent to local education authorities and through them to basic skills providers. Throughout the programme Basic Skills Agency Development and Programme staff have been available to offer advice on basic skills in relation to work. Some 270 visits have been made through the programme to TECs and to basic skills providers.

The first phase of the programme was designed to provide some evidence about the requirements for basic skills in the work place. The intention was to report on those requirements in relation to a local labour market, that is within the boundaries of each TEC.

Labour market research

The Institute of Manpower Studies (IMS) was commissioned to undertake surveys of basic skills requirements as perceived by local employers. Each of the 82 TECs in England and Wales was offered the opportunity to participate in this research and 73 took up the offer on the basis of contributing 25% towards the costs of the research. The research was undertaken between May 1991 and June 1992.

The main aims of the local surveys were to establish:

- ***the standards of literacy, oral communications and numeracy required of employees in a range of jobs within each TEC area***
- ***the extent to which the demands for literacy, oral communications and numeracy arise from the job itself or from other factors within the workplace***
- ***to what extent the demands for basic skills are rising or falling***
- ***the degree of satisfaction that employers have in their employees' basic skills and the basic skills of applicants to jobs.***

In analysing the results of the individual surveys, it is clear that geography and region make very little difference to the requirements of any local labour market. The main determinant of basic skills requirements is occupation which in turn can be modified substantially by size, industry and ownership of the workplace. Information from each of the TEC regions was aggregated, so that the final picture of work place requirements that is reached is based on some 24,000 work places and on some 1.3 million jobs, all in the bottom two thirds of the labour market. The results of this substantive and unique research have been published by the Basic Skills Agency in two volumes.[1] The first volume reports on and analyses the main findings. The second volume breaks down the basic skills requirements into the 49 sub-major groups which make up the six Standard Occupational Groups to which the majority of employees, who are not in managerial, professional and technical occupations, belong.

For the first time in England and Wales, this research established the levels of reading, writing, numeracy and oral communication skills using an objective scale of performance (based on ALBSU Basic Skills Standards). Respondents therefore were not simply asked whether their employees needed literacy and numeracy, they were asked what kind of reading, writing, numeracy and oral communication skills they needed and to what level of sophistication *(see figure 1)*.

1. *Basic Skills and Jobs*: Basic Skills Agency 1993
2. *The Basic Skills needed at Work*: a directory: Basic Skills Agency 1993

Simplified Assessment Schema for Reading and Writing Skills

Reading Skill 1	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
Read and understand text in the form of letters, written instructions, manuals, notes, orders, etc.	Use and act on simple text (up to six sentences or one paragraph)	Understand and act on a written source (e.g. a letter up to one page long)	Choose and use appropriate material from more than one written source	Select and evaluate material from several written sources for a specific need

Reading Skill 2	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
Read and understand graphical material such as tables, signs, charts, labels, plans, maps, etc.	Get the main idea from a simple source (e.g. sign with a single message)	Understand and act on a graphical source up to one page long (e.g. a town map, price list, sign with multiple messages)	Select material from more than one graphical source (e.g. complex tables, plans)	Select and evaluate material from several graphical sources for a specific need

Reading Skill 3	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
Use reference systems such as filing systems, libraries, databases	Use a simple list	Consult a reference source to obtain simple information, (e.g. Yellow Pages, dictionary)	Use a reference system to obtain specific information (e.g. find a book in a library or a file in a filing system)	Select and use appropriate reference systems for a purpose (e.g. research an issue)

Writing Skill 1	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
Write accurate letters, notes, reports or messages	Write short simple notes or letters conveying up to two separate ideas	Write reports, letters or notes conveying up to four separate ideas	Write material in a specialised format (e.g. specifications, contracts, formal letters)	Write material in a variety of appropriate styles and formats according to need

Writing Skill 2	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
Complete forms or other pre-formatted documents	Fill in a basic form (e.g. write an order form, booking slip, receipt)	Complete a simple form (e.g. application form, time-sheet, claim form)	Complete an open-ended form (e.g. accident report form, telephone message form)	Complete forms in a variety of appropriate styles and formats as required

Figure 1

Simplified Assessment Schema for Numeracy and Communication Skills

Numeracy Skill 1	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*
Handle cash or other financial transactions accurately, using till, calculator or ready reckoner as necessary	Transactions of up to seven similar items at a time, give change if necessary	Transactions of up to 20 items at a time, give change and calculate simple discounts	Transactions of any number of items at a time, and calculate complex discounts, OR use foreign currency
Numeracy Skill 2	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*
Keep records in numerical or graphical form	Record simple numerical information (e.g. count small batches)	Find the appropriate information and make a simple record based on it (e.g. simple stock-taking)	Find the appropriate information from several complex sources, make a record based on it (e.g. stock-taking and sales audit)
Numeracy Skill 3	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*
Make and monitor schedules or budgets in order to plan the use of time or money	Plan and monitor small amounts of time and money (up to 7 days or £250)	Plan and monitor amounts of time and money or expenditure (up to 4 weeks or £2,000)	Plan and monitor large amounts of time, money or spending (over 4 weeks or up to £20,000)
Numeracy Skill 4	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*
Calculate lengths, areas, weights or volumes accurately using appropriate tools, e.g. rulers, calculators, etc.	Simple calculations on familiar items in either metric or imperial units	Calculations on items of unfamiliar or irregular shape in either metric or imperial units	Calculations on items of complex or composite shape, use scale drawings, convert between metric and imperial units

Oral Comm. Skill 1	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
Give information to other people on the telephone or face to face	Give information on a single topic to one familiar person	Give information on several topics to unfamiliar people	Explain or describe things to people in order to help them	Prepare and make a formal presentation to a group of people
Oral Comm. Skill 2	*Foundation Level*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
Getting information from other people on the telephone or face to face	Getting information on a single topic from one familiar person	Getting information on several topics from unfamiliar people	Find, select and use appropriate information from several people to solve a problem	Find, select and use complex information from several people to solve a problem or support a case

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THE results show that very few jobs can be done without competence in basic skills, and particularly in reading and oral communication skills. There is considerable demand among employers for higher level basic skills in jobs which are far from the top of the labour market. They also show that there is substantial variation both between and within occupations, in the levels of skills sought and in the precise mix of skills needed by particular jobs.

Employers' needs for employees to have good basic skills extend well beyond the immediate needs of the job. High level basic skills are needed to perform a wide range of activities safely and effectively within the workplace. The most important source of demand for basic skills is undertaking the more responsible aspects of the job and qualifying for promotion. The need for basic skills in order to understand and comply with general workplace procedures is widespread; it does not vary much between jobs or between workplaces.

The research also shows that basic skills has become more important to employers over the last five years and that the increasing demand stems from the need to work with information technology and changing work organisation in particular. The final aim of the research was to establish the adequacy of the supply of basic skills in the labour market. Around 10% of all employers reported that their employees' skills were only just adequate of worse. This dissatisfaction is most marked at the bottom end of the labour market among recruiters to the least skilled occupations and among establishments with a history of labour shortage. However nearly one in four employers report that applicants' basic skills are only just adequate or worse. Furthermore this dissatisfaction with applicants is much less concentrated at the bottom of the labour market.

The research shows that the range and number of jobs open to those who have problems with basic skills is small and shrinking. If someone cannot reach Foundation Level in any of the main component skills which make up the Agency's Standards, 49 out of 50 jobs are closed to them 50% of all jobs are closed to someone who can only perform at Foundation Level of the Standards and 25% of all jobs are closed to someone whose skills only reach Level 1 of the Standards. You need basic skills at Level 2 of the Standards for most jobs, albeit still in the bottom two thirds of the labour market, to be available.

Surveys of basic skills provision

The first stage of the programme tried to establish the demand for employment related basic skills; the second stage of the programme attempted to look at the supply side. TECs in their position as contractors of basic skills were the prime audience for this second stage of the programme and all TECs who participated in the first stage were offered the opportunity for their vocationally related basic skills provision to be reviewed and reported. Cambridge Training and Development Ltd were contracted to deliver this service and consultants appointed by them spent between three and seven days in each TEC area talking to deliverers and organisers both in TEC contracted provision and in LEA provision. 72 surveys were undertaken.

This phase of the programme demanded not only an acute sense of judgment to be displayed about the quality of provision, but took place at a highly sensitive time. TECs were themselves at an early stage of development; the White Paper that was to herald the new Further and Higher Education Act removing control of colleges from LEAs had just been published.[3] The majority of the

surveys were conducted between November 1991 and November 1992. Each survey followed a set format. The participating TECs and the LEAs were asked to identify all providers of vocationally related basic skills. The Agency's Development Officers supplemented these lists from their own local knowledge. Interviews, following a standard format, were conducted with the major providers as well as with a sample of smaller providers.

Although the quality and quantity of vocationally related provision varied from area to area, as indeed did the quality of the survey work, a number of general issues emerged from the surveys:

- *much local education authority provision focused on the acquisition of basic skills in an everyday rather than in a work context; very few curricula or materials focused on specific literacy and numeracy skills demanded by jobs or indeed used the workplace as a context. The most commonly reported type of vocationally related basic skills provision related to preparing individuals for entry tests for specific jobs, in particular for the emergency services*

- *many TECs had inadequate information about the provision that they contracted and lacked internal expertise to make judgments about quality provision*

- *the amount of work being undertaken with companies was very small; companies did not on the whole provide a focus for the curriculum and examples of customised basic skills training were few and far between.*

3. Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (HMSO)

Pilot projects

The final phase of the programme involved the development of 40 pilot projects. Most of these were sponsored through TECs but a small number were directly with companies. Guidelines for submitting pilot projects were sent out in October 1991 to all TECs and to basic skills providers. Proposals could only be submitted from those who had participated in the earlier phases of the programme. Pilot projects were sponsored for one year and the programme bore 75% of the costs; the remaining quarter had to come from local sources. In deciding between projects priority was given to those who were able to show a partnership approach between TECs and local basic skills providers. Applications which came from a providing organisation on its own were not considered and it was expected that TECs would hold the contract for the project with the Basic Skills Agency.

Meetings held in each of the participating TECs at which the Basic Skills Agency reviewed the results and implications of the first two stages of the programme, provided the jumping off ground for the development of Pilot Projects. In giving guidance to those preparing projects a clear steer was given by the Basic Skills Agency, requiring project proposals to clearly link basic skills delivery to vocational or occupational areas. Where the project was proposing to work with the employed, and the majority did, there was a requirement to recruit interested companies to the project prior to the funding period. All the projects were monitored by Basic Skills Agency Development Officers following guidelines provided by the programme and to the projects. Summary reports were received from the projects at 6 and at 12 months and a fuller narrative report after the end of the funding period.

INITIALLY the preparation of project proposals took rather longer than anticipated. Therewere a range of reasons for this in particular:

- *difficulties in recruiting companies*
- *difficulties in developing viable partnerships.*

One effect of the slow start of projects was a shortfall in expenditure initially planned for 1992/93. The funding Departments however agreed to extend the programme to a fourth year, and to take up this shortfall in 1994/95. A brief outline of a number of the projects may provide a flavour of the range of the projects overall

The funded projects[4] included:

a. a project based with the Ford Motor Company at Dagenham to develop an Open Learning Centre able to respond to basic skills needs within the context of complex shift patterns

b. a project with Norfolk and Waveney TEC and Norfolk County Council designed to increase the pool of people ready to take up work in retail distribution. The project worked closely with all the major supermarket chains

c. a project with Wearside TEC targeted at engineering and production companies working with the Northern Association of the Engineering Employers' Federation

d. a project with Northumberland TEC designed to help those involved in the fishing industry to cope with the decline of the industry through the provision of basic skills support for NVQs

e. a project with Barnsley and Doncaster TEC working with the local authority and with the Health Trust preparing people for NVQ training

f. Rotherham TEC working with 4 basic skills providers delivering programmes in a number of workplaces in a variety of sectors, manufacturing, public and voluntary. The TEC encouraged the delivery of basic skills training as part of its IIP/NVQ programme

g. Hertfordshire TEC working with Oaklands College provided basic skills to small catering outlets, largely employing people with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs to back up the acquisition of the Food Hygiene Certificate

h. Falconis – a large bakery in North London – established a system of English language and literacy training for line leaders and supervisors.

4. A full list of projects funded forms appendix 1 to this report

Across the pilot projects as a whole, training was delivered to over 7,400 people.[5] All but around 250 of these were employees in over 300 different kinds of companies in both the public and the private sector. It is difficult to be certain of the amount of delivery in terms of individual student hours that took place over the course of the pilot projects. Projects reported in rather different ways and appeared to find it particularly difficult to report usefully on delivery through open learning. We can estimate that around 222,000 individual student hours were delivered across the projects as a whole. There was a significant variation between projects, ranging from one project (Merseyside) where 80 participants received around 18 hours tuition a week over nearly 30 weeks to, at the other extreme, a project where some individuals received only around 3 hours tutor led training through an Open Learning resource (Ford). The more normal pattern of delivery was through a short course delivered to small groups in sessions of 2 to 3 hours over a period of weeks.

Attendance averaged at 77% and some 3000 accredited outcomes were recorded over the 40 projects. Again there were significant differences between projects here. In some (Norfolk, North Derbyshire) all participants received accreditation: in others only a tiny minority (Greater Peterborough 4 out of 156). In nearly all the projects students were new to any kinds of basic skills provision and there are strong indications that most of them would not have accessed other basic skills provision being provided through local colleges or local education authorities.

We have sought to judge the effectiveness, in particular of the projects, through research activity and through the application of a number of qualitative criteria to the projects.

5. One project failed to provide statistical information

Eight criteria were developed against which to judge the effectiveness of projects and this provides us with some indicators of success.

The criteria were:

1. ***TEC involvement. Was the TEC a major player in the project ?***
2. ***TEC policy to basic skills. What kind of profile did the TEC give to basic skills at work?***
3. ***Continuation of the work. Did the work continue?***
4. ***Further funding for the work. Was the work continued with new and additional money being made available?***
5. ***Dissemination. What was the level and effectiveness of local dissemination?***
6. ***Effectiveness of training. How effective was the training provided?***
7. ***Impact of Basic Skills at Work on provider. What kind of profile did Basic Skills at Work have in providing organisations?***
8. ***Level of involvement of employers. What was the involvement of management and supervisory staff in the project.***

Marks from 1 to 5 were attached to each criteria with 1 indicating a negative assessment and 5 a positive assessment. The aggregated results from all the projects are shown in the pie charts *(See figure 2)*.

An analysis of the criteria for judging success or failure shows that in nearly three quarters of the projects' work continued after the funding through the programme stopped. However only around 60% had found a source of new or additional money to any significant degree to continue the work. The projects overall had

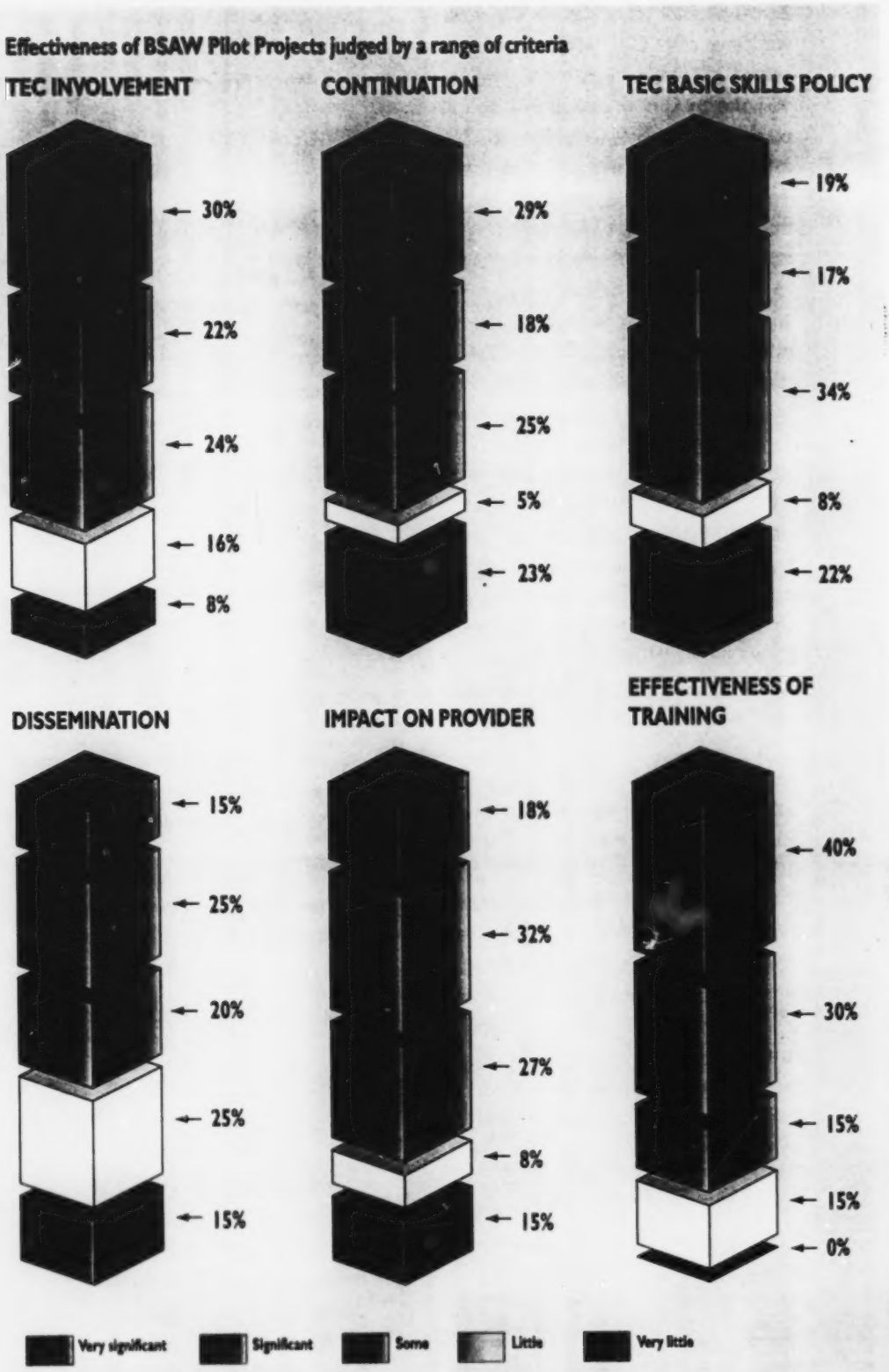
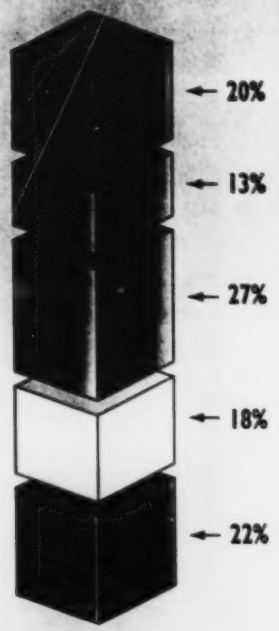
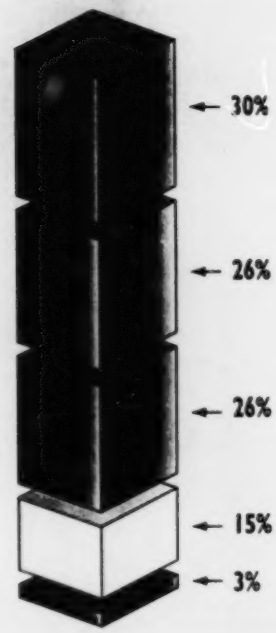

Effectiveness of BSAW Pilot Projects judged by a range of criteria
TEC INVOLVEMENT
30%
22%
24%
16%
8%
CONTINUATION
29%
18%
25%
5%
23%
TEC BASIC SKILLS POLICY
19%
17%
34%
8%
22%
DISSEMINATION
15%
25%
20%
25%
15%
IMPACT ON PROVIDER
18%
32%
27%
8%
15%
EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING
40%
30%
15%
15%
0%
Very significant
Significant
Some
Little
Very little

Figure 2





very significant impact on providers of training and the effectiveness of training was high. Involvement of managers and supervisors in companies was also high.

There is a strong correlation between various of the criteria. Where the TEC had a high level of involvement in the project the likelihood of the work continuing in some form was much higher than where it simply acted as a banker and/or an occasional host. There were exceptions to this. For example in the North Derbyshire project where the TEC took a relatively low profile during the course of the project. However this low profile was probably offset by a high score on Criterion 2 – TEC policy to basic skills. A number of the projects which scored quite highly on many of the criteria, recorded low scores on the measure relating to new or additional money being made available, even though in terms of effectiveness of training they were judged successful. There is clearly no guarantee that the delivery of effective training will lead to further funding for this area of work.

The 10 projects which performed best as judged against these criteria developed internally by the Basic Skills Agency also perform well against other indicators. For example the cost per individual employee/student is below average for the projects as a whole; the ten projects between them have dealt with nearly 40% of all those who have received basic skills training through the programme. It is noteworthy that eight out of the ten highest scoring projects were all approved during the later part of the project approval process.[6] It would be reasonable to draw the conclusion that the additional preparation time that attached to these projects paid dividends. The two exceptions are two of the company led projects (Ford and GKN Chep).

6. The highest scoring projects were Bradford, Rotherham, Devon and Cornwall, Wearside, Suffolk, North Derbyshire, Ford GKN Chep, Calderdale, Northumberland.

Embedding
ood practice

PART of the purpose of any initiative such as the Basic Skills at Work Programme must be to attempt to increase the quality of delivery as well as the quantity. It is also important that any relatively short-lived programme can provide some resources and information which contractors and providers can draw on in the future. In this context three aspects of the programme occur:

- ***the production of training and materials***
- ***the dissemination of lessons learnt and information gathered***
- ***research and evaluation.***

Training and materials

The training resources which have been produced as part of the programme arose partly to assist the delivery of high quality vocationally related basic skills and partly to address some of the obstacles to delivery. Fairly early on in the programme two training events were held for those participating in the projects. These aimed to help people focus on the delivery of vocationally related curriculum and on requirements within the workplace.

A video showing how a 'typical' company might begin to address the poor basic skills of its workforce has been produced. This was produced alongside a booklet *'Making it Happen: Improving the basic skills of the workforce'*. It raises the general issues about basic skills at work and suggests strategies that a company might employ to deliver basic skills training.[7]

The programme also sponsored the production of a basic skills course, *Improving Basic Skills in the Workplace*[8], directed to the Catering and Hospitality industry – food handling and manufacture being an area which has proved fertile for basic skills training. *Basic Skills for NVQs*, booklets to assist those delivering NVQs, aims to draw out the underpinning communication skills and numeracy requirements from the 9 most popular NVQs.[9] *Basic Skills Support in Business and Industry* gives training managers in companies information about how basic skills difficulties are likely to affect their company[10]. It suggests ways in which a company can assess its requirements for basic skills and identify those who need basic skills support. It also provides some practical examples to help companies adapt their training methods and materials and improve their employees' basic skills.

Dissemination

Dissemination has been partly through publications, including those mentioned above but in addition the programme developed a strategy to try to address the issue of embedding some of the lessons of the programme. The aspects of this strategy were:

A Training certificate for trainers in industry. This has reached the final stage of development. A series of competence statements linked to the Training and Development Lead Body standards has been made available to City and Guilds who are developing an accredited award. The award has been piloted and in its final form is now available.

A How to do it Manual. This publication is now available and reported above as *Basic Skills Support in Business and Industry*. A marketing flyer has been produced and widely circulated in the Basic Skills Agency newsletter as well as to TECs and employer contacts.

7. *Making it Happen: Improving the basic skills of the workforce*: The Basic Skills Agency 1993
8. *Improving basic skills in the workplace*: A core course for the catering and hospitality industry: The Basic Skills Agency 1993
9. *Basic Skills for NVQs*: The Basic Skills Agency 1995
10. *Basic Skills Support in Business and Industry*: The Basic Skills Agency 1994

Employer database. This resource commissioned from the Institute of Employment Studies, provides a unique access point to up-to-date information on employers' training practices for basic skills. It provides information on:

- *the sort of training provided*
- *the sources of training provision used*
- *the staff groups for whom it was provided*
- *the skill deficiencies which it addressed.*

It is being made widely available to TECs and ITOs as well as to Business Link and other intermediary organisations who offer advice on training to companies.[11]

Technical Support. For the purposes of the Basic Skills at Work Programme technical support was defined as assistance to help employers to set up or develop basic skills training in their companies appropriately and to a high quality. The purpose was to provide an impetus for those who know they need to do something about their employees' skills but need some guidance and the injection of a small amount of expertise to set them in the right direction. A prospectus was prepared advertising the service and circulated to TECs and direct to some companies who had previously contacted the Basic Skills Agency. The following companies have taken up the opportunity of technical support and received anything from 2 to 10 days consultancy:

Glaxo
WB Bawn
Unipart
Britax Wingard
Freemantle Trust
GN Netcom
University College Hospital
Touchstone Housing Association
Northern Line (London Underground)
Alcan Wire and Conductor
Oxford City Council
Kerry Foods
Hinchingbrooke Health Trust
Merton and Sutton Health Trust
Dewhirst Ladieswear
Railfreight Distribution
LB Hackney Construction Services
Tesco Distribution Centre (Gwent)
Wales Health Authority
Tesco Distribution Centre (Hereford)
Cheshire County Council
United Distillers
Supreme Leisurewear
Tambrand
Surrey Ambulance Service
Parkside Health Authority.

Technical Support for these companies has included:

- *conducting an analysis of the basic skills needs of employees*
- *analysing the basic skills requirements of jobs and the workplace*
- *undertaking screening assessment with employees*
- *drawing up basic skills training plans on the basis of assessment*
- *advising on delivery of basic skills training*
- *evaluating current training methods in relation to inclusion of basic skills training*
- *developing appropriate work specific training materials*

11. *Which companies provides basic skills training: a database*: Basic Skills Agency 1995

- ***training for Training Managers or supervisory staff***
- ***advice on readability of internal communication documents***
- ***assistance in running a short course.***

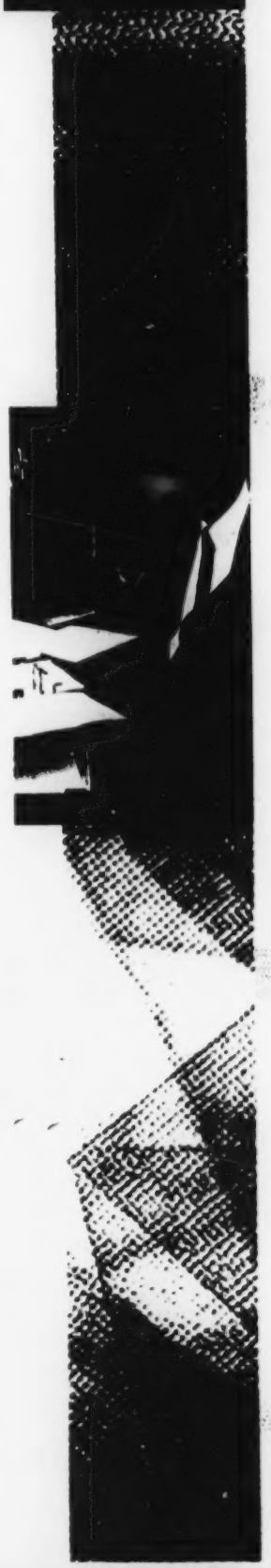
Although this aspect of the dissemination strategy got off to a slow start the reception from the companies who participated was positive. We have been discussing technical support with the Training and Enterprise Councils through NVQ co-ordinators and those responsible for IIP. In the longer term these contacts are likely to bear fruit, but we still face a major problem of lack of awareness amongst employers.

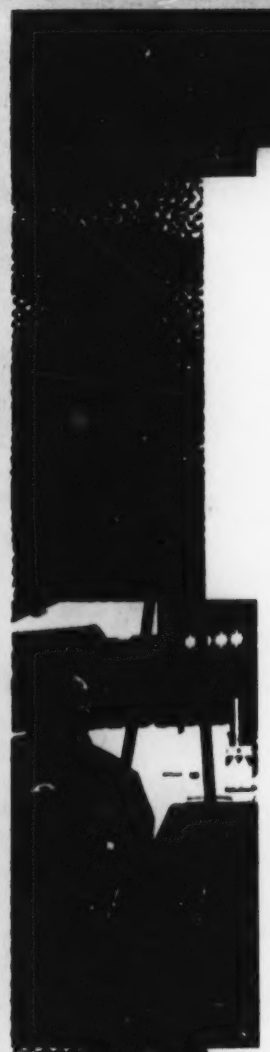
Promotion to employers. We have explored a number of avenues in order to promote the Basic Skills at Work Programme to employers. A 'newsletter', *Basic Skills Focus*, has been produced on four occasions and twice inserted into issues of Personnel Today. The other two issues have been distributed to a smaller mailing list of companies known to be interested in basic skills training. A radio commercial inviting companies to ring for information was also produced for Classic FM. 28 companies rang for further information about basic skills training. As much as anything else the purpose of such promotion is to raise awareness rather than to expect any direct response. Comments from companies contacting the Basic Skills Agency indicate that they have recently associated our work with their needs. Clearly such evidence of increased awareness is anecdotal.

Our proposals to hold a series of regional and national events which would attract employers to further disseminate the products and lessons of the *Basic Skills at Work Programme* has turned out to be misconceived. Despite spreading the net widely in terms of issuing invitations we have failed to attract a sufficiently large audience to the regional events and a number have been cancelled rather than been held with tiny and inappropriate audiences. It is clear that basic skills is not an important enough subject to attract this audience to conferences. Partly as a result of this, but also because it confirms other experiences within the Basic Skills Agency, we have decided that we are more likely to be able to reach these audiences if we put effort into seeking invitations to be part of other people's platforms.

A meeting at the RSA held jointly with the RSA Examinations Board attracted some 20 people from Lead Industry Bodies. The meeting was followed up with a mailing both to those who did and didn't attend reiterating the messages about basic skills and jobs. The meeting was chaired on the Basic Skills Agency's behalf by the chairman of the Distributive Occupational Standards Council (DOSC).

A second national event chaired by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal was attended by just over 20 people, the majority of whom were Group Personnel Directors in major companies. In its own terms this event was successful. However perhaps more importantly as a result Whitbread held a meeting for all its companies' personnel directors following further briefing; WH Smith is looking at its pre-recruitment policy and the possibility of introducing pre-recruitment training. Grand Met is looking to pursue technical support with some of its companies.





Research

Much of the development of the Basic Skills at Work Programme rested on the early research into the requirements for basic skills in the workplace conducted by the Institute of Manpower Studies. We believed it was also important to attempt to establish whether basic skills training at work is effective. With the pilot projects we had the raw material which could be used to address the question 'Does basic skills training make any difference'.

In 1993 therefore the Basic Skills Agency commissioned WMEB Consultants in partnership with the University of Birmingham's School of Continuing Studies to undertake some research to examine the effectiveness of basic skills training in the workplace. We wanted to know what, if any, difference such training made either to the company where it was taking place or to the individual employee.[12]

The research set out to look at:

- ***the contribution which workplace training can make to improving the basic skills of an individual or group of individuals***
- ***the impact that this has on their performance at work and, in turn, upon the performance of the company or employer***
- ***any indirect benefits of the programme and the impact of these on the individual's quality of life, both within and outside the workplace.***

The research was based upon a detailed assessment of basic skills training taking place in 17 companies. Both employees and intermediate layers of management in all the projects believed basic skills training was effective in terms of the objectives set at the

outset. In a small number of cases there was concern that the achievements were not fully appreciated by senior management.

Most case studies demonstrated a large measure of effectiveness on their own terms. However some also demonstrated the achievement of a range of wider objectives. The case study analysis of each company revealed that the impact of basic skills training was closely related to how the employer perceived the potential benefits of the training programme. Issues of employer awareness and commitment were critical factors contributing to the relative effectiveness of the programme.

Three broad models of employer involvement were drawn. The first focused on the individual employee; the second arose to address a

12. *Basic Skills Training at Work – A study in effectiveness*, The Basic Skills Agency 1995

particular problem and the third arose from a strategy designed to address the needs of the company as a whole. Looking across the three models, this last model provided the most significant gains in relation to the resources expended. The focus on broad communication skills combined with numeracy and literacy, provided the most significant benefits. The most cost effective programmes are those where there are clear and direct benefits to both employer and employee. Within this context the training makes a clear contribution to corporate survival and growth. At the same time employees are provided with skills which develop their individual potential.

Two employers falling within the company strategy model attributed a quantifiable increase in production output to the training. Two employers at least considered that the training had created a cohesion and flexibility within the workforce which would make it much easier to introduce organisational changes in the future. Several companies reported reduced pressure on production managers as a result of workforce empowerment facilitated by the training programmes.

One of the most serious barriers to the development of basic skills training reported by the research backs up our more general perception and is the lack of employer awareness of its effectiveness. The research shows that the identification of basic skill needs, and also of the means of addressing those needs more often, occurs as a result of fortuitous accident or response to a crisis or problem. It does not result from a formal process of human resource planning and appraisal linked to corporate strategy. So, even within the 'more enlightened' population of employers the question of awareness appears to be critical.

Assessing the programme

IN Spring 1991 the then Secretary of State for Education announced that a new Further and Higher Education Act was planned which would remove control of colleges from LEAs, establish a new Further Education Funding Council in England and a similar Council in Wales and include basic skills in Schedule 2 of the Act. This made one of the original objectives – to develop stronger links between LEAs and TECs – difficult, particularly as the majority of LEAs were no longer to be responsible for basic skills work for young people and adults. The programme sought therefore to encourage TECs, basic skills providers and particularly the newly incorporated FE Colleges to work together in this area.

Research undertaken as part of the Basic Skills at Work Programme shows that almost 9 in 10 jobs require good communication skills, including reading and writing skills. English is the main language in 99% of all workplaces in England and Wales. The majority of jobs require some competence in basic maths. Jobs that do not require basic skills are disappearing rapidly and people with the poorest mastery of basic skills have little choice of job in modern Britain. Anyone with basic skills problems is likely to experience long and frequent periods of unemployment. *The Basic Skills at Work Programme* largely excluded the needs of the unemployed, who were in many cases able to receive basic skills training through other government funded programmes. It chose to concentrate on the employed whose needs for basic skills training had been largely ignored in the past.

An external evaluation of the Basic Skills at Work Programme was commissioned from IFF Ltd, to evaluate the Programme overall against its original aims and objectives.[13] The external evaluation took 18 projects as case studies as well as looking at final reports from the projects overall. It concluded that the Programme was well managed, raised the profile of basic skills particularly in the project areas but was significantly affected by the recession and by lack of awareness. It suggests that there is a major problem in relation to the awareness of the significance of basic skills among employers and among TECs.

The evaluation also points to issues related to the timing of the programme and the difficulties created by the allocation of specific sums of money to particular financial years. In particular this put significant pressure on the process of developing and approving pilot projects.

This evaluation highlights continuing benefits of the Basic Skills at Work Programme in relation to:

- ***the development of college links with employers***
- ***the creation of expertise among practitioners***
- ***the new training certificate which will increase the number of competent trainers in the workplace***
- ***improved understanding and co-operation from participating employers***
- ***integration in some TECs of basic skills in other activities including IIP and NETTs.***

13. *Basic Skills at Work: Case Studies: Basic Skills at Work: Report on Reports: Basic Skills at Work : Overview and Conclusions*, (IFF Ltd)

In conclusion, the Basic Skills at Work Programme has helped to improve basic skills training by:

- *Funding local surveys of the basic skills needed for employment. Basic skills training can now be linked closely to the requirements of British industry and business.*

- *Providing an assessment of existing vocationally focused basic skills provision. The results of this phase of work showing the lack of focus in this area provided an impetus for the development of training and materials, locally and nationally.*

- *Sponsoring projects which intended to explore innovative methods of providing basic skills training. Pilot Projects have, as expected, varied in effectiveness but many have established significant basic skills training programmes with employers and the scale of employer involvement in basic skills training has increased substantially through the Basic Skills at Work Programme.*

As a result of the Basic Skills at Work Programme we have therefore:

- *acquired authoritative research information about basic skills and employment*

- *ascertained the inadequacy of much existing vocationally related basic skills training*

- *piloted new initiatives to improve workplace basic skills training*

- *increased the scale of workplace basic skills training.*

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Conclusions

THERE is already considerable employer concern about the basic skills of employees and even more dissatisfaction with the basic skills of people applying for jobs. A recent study estimated that basic skills problems cost the British economy more than £4.8 billion a year[14]. On average, it costs every company employing over about 50 employees £165,000 every year. The average company employing 1,000 people or more could save £500 per employee if the basic skills of the workforce were improved. Increasingly the poorly educated and poorly trained are being seen as unemployable.

Companies have a major role to play in helping their workforce up-grade and improve basic skills and greater priority needs to be given to workplace basic skills training; not as an 'add on', but as an integral part of occupational training. There is too little job related training in general for less skilled employees. For example, only one in twenty plant and machine operatives had received any training in the four weeks prior to the Labour Force Survey in Summer 1993. Certainly, training in basic skills is scarce at present compared with the level of provision made by our major competitors, certainly significantly lower than in some individual States in the USA.

Some progress has been made in recent years through Basic Skills at Work. Some major companies, including Ford UK, Nestles, Vauxhall, British Rail, Land Rover, Rank Xerox and Northern Foods have become involved in improving the basic skills of their workforce. Some companies, such as Ford, have established open learning centres on site; others have integrated basic skills training into employee training programmes (GKN) and some have run specific courses (Trebor Basset)

Most of the companies who have participated in the pilot technical support offered as part of the Basic Skills at Work Programme and indeed in the pilot projects recognised that basic skills was an issue for them. Glaxo for example a major pharmaceutical company recognises that to stay competitive its employees have to be able to work in teams and to become skilled in areas that have not previously concerned them. It recognises that it has a potential problem with its current employees who have neither the skills or the education to deal with the changing demands. They have various systems in place to appraise performance and to assess people's vocational skills, however they were doubtful that any of these were able to help assess the underpinning basic skills required. What they needed in the first place was some technical help to see how their documentation which related to their Standard Operating Procedures could be used to assess both basic skills requirements and basic skills needs. In the longer term they probably need help to develop appropriate training packages.

University College Hospital faces something rather similar but in an entirely different context. They have large numbers of low paid jobs which are becoming increasingly demanding as the hospital restructures its workforce. Many of these employees do not speak English as their first language. In the first instance they needed to know what the implications of restructuring are for these staff in terms of use of communication skills and basic maths. They then needed help with developing a training plan to deal with these needs. In the longer term they probably need some funding if they are to fully put the plan into action.

We recognise that it is much more difficult for small and medium size companies to find the money to invest in developing and integrating basic skills training into company training

14. *The Cost to Industry: Basic Skills and the UK Workforce*, Basic Skills Agency

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programmes. We continue to believe that some help, particularly with initial development, is essential for many companies particularly as employment is likely to continue to be dominated by small and medium size companies as traditional, heavy industry declines. Some support which helps companies identify their needs and their requirements and provides some assistance with embedding basic skills appropriately needs to be available. Funding for the development of basic skills training should be an integral part of vocational and occupational training.

TECs have a major role to play in making companies aware of the importance of training for less skilled workers. TECs need to ensure that employers understand that support with basic skills needs to be an integral part of vocational and occupational training and an essential element in Investors in People. TECs also need to encourage more employers to assess employees for basic skills training needs. A small number of large companies already assess for basic skills needs as part of training needs analysis and this should become commonplace. However most companies do not assess their requirements for basic skills, nor the extent to which these match their employees' skills. In our experience through the Basic Skills at Work Programme they do not know how to set about finding this out if they recognise the issue at all. The next step of implementing measures to raise basic skills levels to match requirements is therefore some distance from them.

Changes in the nature of jobs and the composition of the workforce highlight the need for workplace basic skills programmes and encourage companies to reassess what skills they require from their workforce. The introduction of new technology, quality related systems such as statistical process control, and organisational changes which emphasise team working, all require much higher levels of technical, conceptual and communication skills.

The kinds of skills needed in the workplace to address these changing demands include basic literacy and numeracy but oral communication is also increasingly important in the workplace environment. The importance of workplace basic skills has been underscored by a link between basic skills and productivity. Daily reading is now a requirement of almost every job and increasing numbers of jobs demand high levels of education. Key findings from the study, *Basic Skills and Jobs*, included the importance of having a firm basic skills foundation on which to build more technical and sophisticated competencies. The research concludes that attempts to introduce innovative organisational structures such as quality circles and team will be doomed to failure if the individuals concerned are not equipped with the required range of basic skills.

We have remained convinced that the lack of awareness amongst companies of both the effectiveness of basic skills training and of the extent to which the working population has basic skills needs which could be usefully addressed at work, is a formidable barrier to further development. We have no doubt that unless there is a continuing programme of raising awareness the amount of basic skills training that will take place in companies will remain tiny.

Awareness in this context means:

- ***companies know the importance and relevance of basic skills competence among staff at all levels***
- ***companies know the extent of basic skills deficiencies in their current workforce***
- ***companies know the impact that changes in work organisation, quality systems etc. will have on skills requirements***

- ***companies know how they or other agencies can offer support for the development of basic skills***

- ***companies know that basic skills training can be delivered in non-traditional ways i.e. at the workplace, at times stipulated by the employer and with minimal disruption to production.***

Companies need to overcome all five of the above awareness barriers if basic skill needs are to be properly identified and an appropriate response developed.

There is a substantial amount of indirect evidence to suggest that the employer/employee needs addressed within the Basic Skills at Work Programme represent the tip of a very substantial iceberg. Typical perceptions at senior management level are that training is primarily only of benefit in assisting managers to manage, that is to give instructions to the workforce. Training for shop floor staff is only relevant if it is of a very specific technical or vocational orientation.

Some of the work started by the Basic Skills at Work Programme can be integrated within the main work of the Basic Skills Agency. However, there is a limit to the amount that can be done within existing resources.

Outside the critical area of promotion, specific funding will continue to be necessary to provide companies with specialist advice on how to integrate basic skills training into their existing training strategies. The Basic Skills at Work Programme has indicated that integration is a far better option than trying to 'bolt on' basic skills training as a separate activity, in all but exceptional cases. Integration also better reflects the requirements which arise because of changes in companies. Basic skills training becomes a necessity because a company cannot change its work organisation effectively or introduce new technologies without it. It doesn't stand outside the business opportunities for the company, but rather is a prerequisite to fulfilling these opportunities. Most employees have some skills and often need 'up-skilling' rather than remediation. But advice and support is essential if this integration is to be done effective.

Some funds should be available to help establish basic skills training. The Basic Skills Agency will be providing some funding to support the *Certificate in Providing Basic Skills in Industry* but in most cases this will only be appropriate where a company has designated training personnel. Small and medium size companies in particular find the development costs of establishing basic skills training prohibitive. We would suggest that funding should be matched and that funding is released on the basis of a developmental plan which links to their business objectives and that has been developed as a result of advice and support. In addition a clear link to the Investors in People Standard, including in literature produced to support that Standard, with some funding attached to the consultancy arrangements designed to support the Standard would provide valuable TEC support and involvement.

To address these major issues which link the concepts of education, training and improving industrial competitiveness requires a multi-agency approach reflecting commitment at the highest level. The fact that they cut across the brief of more than one government department is not helpful. The development of integrated Government offices at the regional level offers an opportunity. Once considered primarily an educational issue, lack of proficiency in literacy and numeracy has now become a crucial concern for business.

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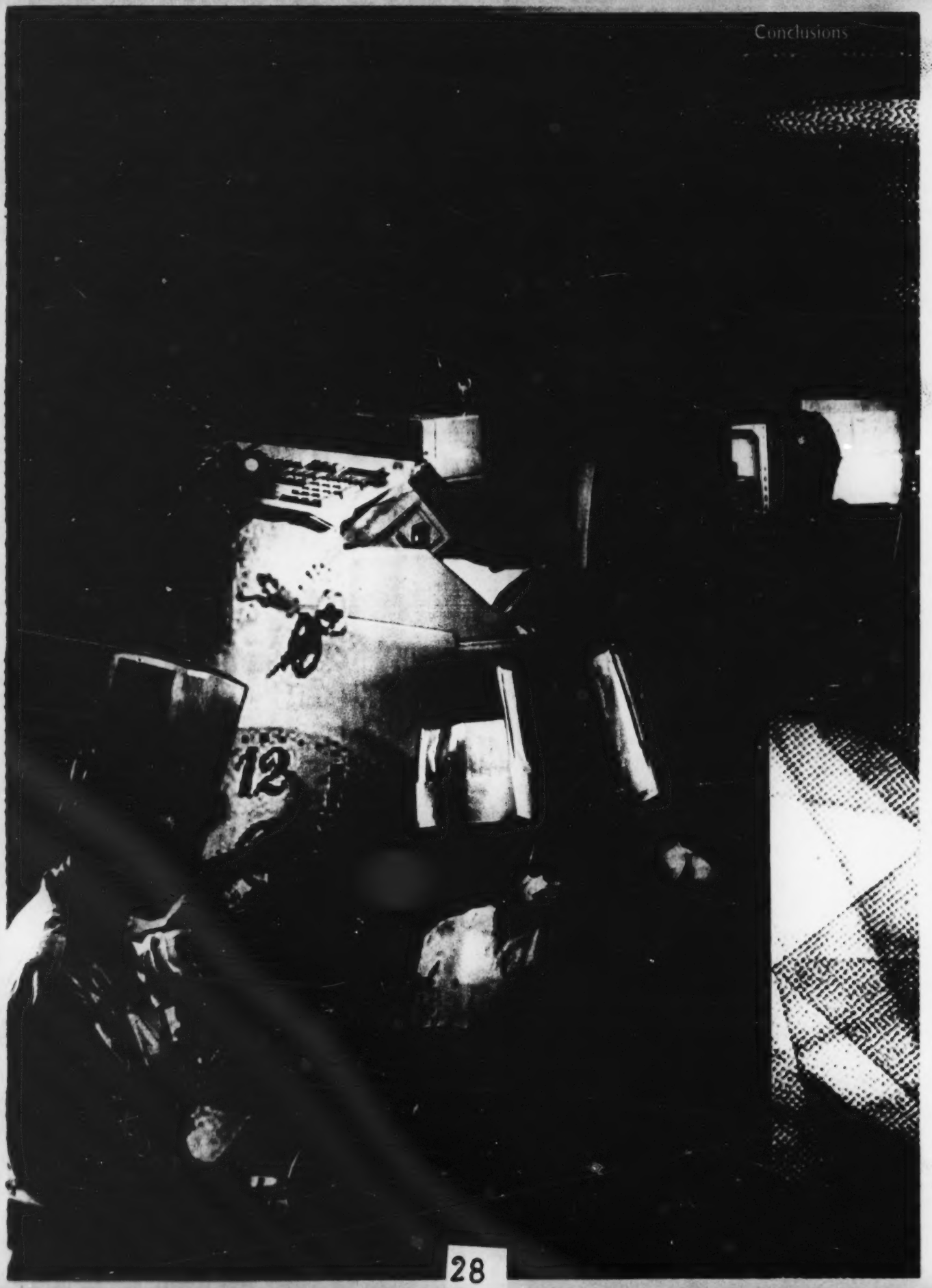
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Appendix 1
Pilot Projects

Organisations contracted to deliver pilot projects as part of the Basic Skills at Work Programme:

- Barnsley and Doncaster TEC
- Bedfordshire TEC
- Birmingham TEC
- Bradford TEC
- Calderdale and Kirkless TEC
- Central England TEC
- CEWTEC
- Devon and Cornwall TEC
- Dudley TEC
- Durham TEC
- Falconis TEC
- Ford Motor Company
- GKN Chep Ltd
- Gloucestershire TEC
- Greater Nottinghamshire TEC
- Greater Peterborough TEC
- Gwent TEC
- Hertfordshire TEC
- Leeds TEC
- London East TEC
- Merseyside TEC
- Mid Glamorgan TEC
- Network South East
- Norfolk TEC
- North Derbyshire TEC
- North London TEC
- North Nottinghamshire TEC
- Northamptonshire TEC
- Northumberland TEC
- Oldham TEC
- Rotherham TEC
- Shropshire TEC
- South and East Cheshire TEC
- South Derbyshire TEC
- Suffolk TEC
- Sussex TEC
- Walsall TEC
- Wearside TEC
- West Wales TEC
- Wiltshire TEC

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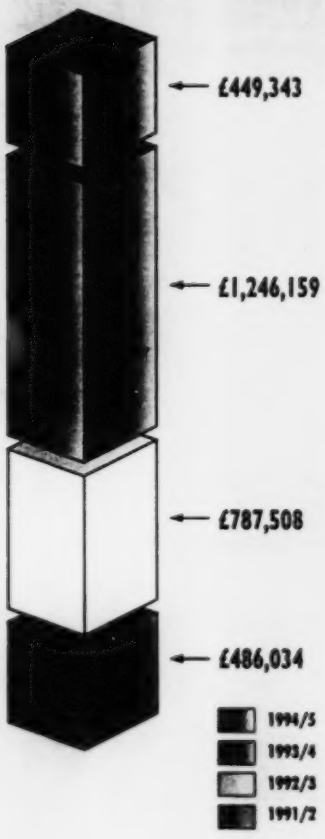
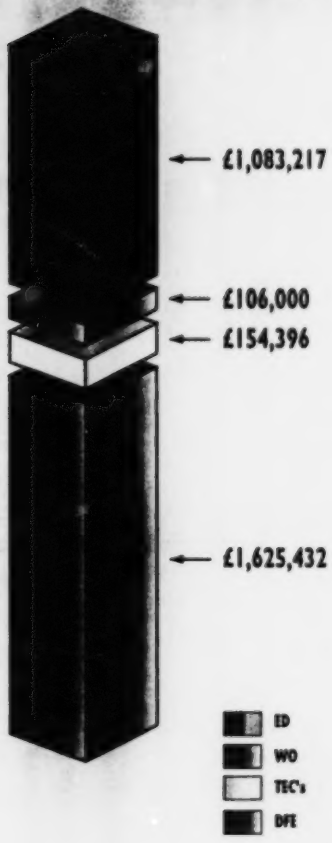
TOTAL INCOME BY YEAR

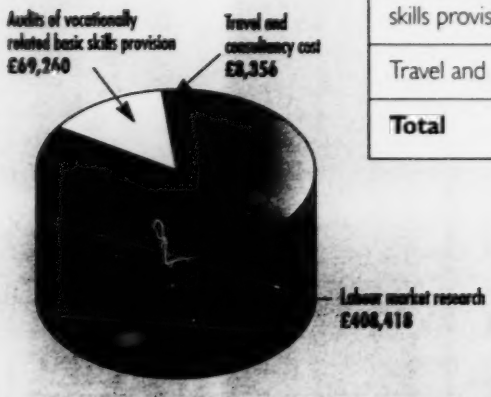


TOTAL INCOME BY SOURCE



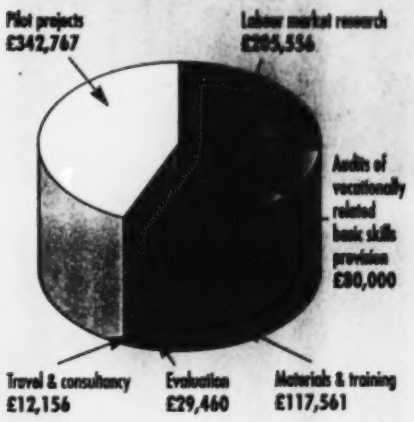
Appendix 2 Financial Information

Expenditure 1991/92



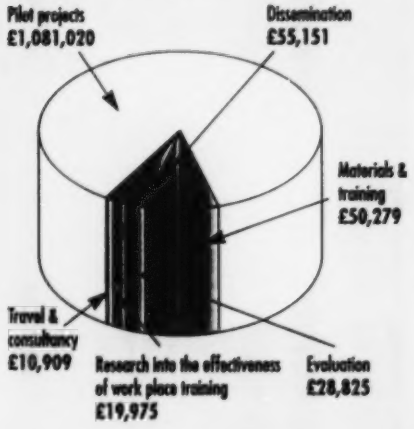
Labour market research	£408,418
Audits of vocationally related basic skills provision	£69,260
Travel and consultancy costs	£8,356
Total	**£486,034**

Expenditure 1992/93



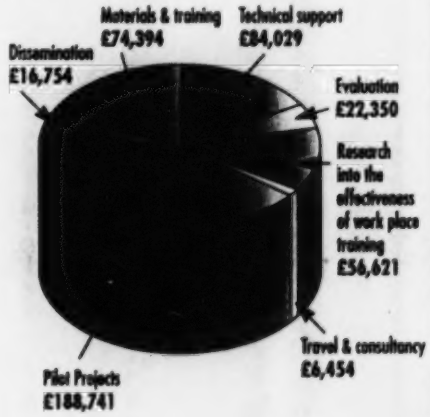
Labour market research	£205,556
Audits of vocationally related basic skills provision	£80,000
Materials and training	£117,561
Evaluation	£29,460
Travel and consultancy costs	£12,165
Pilot projects	£342,767
Total	**£787,508**

Expenditure 1993/94



Materials and Training	£50,279
Evaluation	£28,825
Research into the effectiveness of work place training	£19,975
Travel and consultancy	£10,909
Pilot projects	£1,081,020
Dissemination	£55,151
Total	**£1,246,159**

Expenditure 1994/95



Materials and training	£74,394
Evaluation	£22,350
Research into the effectivess of work place training	£56,621
Travel and consultancy	£6,454
Pilot projects	£188,741
Dissemination	£16,754
Technical support	£84,029
Total	**£449,343**

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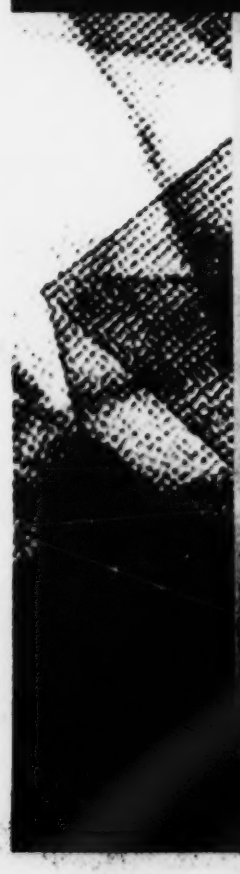

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